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van der Poel, Stefan

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The Shoah within a collective European Memory

Stefan van der Poel

Historical consensus among Western European countries regarding World War II, and the Shoah in particular, has been undermined since 2004 by the eastern enlargement of the European Union: in pursuit of a collective European memory, the Shoah plays a disruptive role. The idea or conviction of a unifying pan-European historical narrative is not only premised on the perception that the future of Europe would depend on a shared memory, but also that a reckoning with a totalitarian past is indispensable for the process of democratisation across Europe. In Western Europe there is a growing mistrust that Eastern European nations have a sufficiently critical perspective on their nationalist and anti-Semitic past and traditions. Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile, fear that the dominant role played by the Shoah in Western memory would displace the memories of oppression experienced by non-Jews during World War II, while at the same time diminishing the enormity of communist crimes (see, for example, Struve, 2008: 24). The Shoah as a potential foundational event of European identity thus remains, in various respects, controversial.

This paper analyses the memory crisis resulting from the conflicting perceptions of the Shoah in Western and Central Europe, more specifically in Poland and Hungary, the countries that harboured the largest pre-war Jewish communities. To clarify this memory crisis, crucial aspects of these divergent perceptions will be discussed. In the Western perspective, there is a strong tendency to underline the universal meaning and importance of the Shoah and to institutionalise this in a number of UN and EU resolutions and declarations (see, for example, Sierp, 2017; Leggewie, 2009; 2010; Schmid, 2008). By doing so the Shoah serves as a global icon for a global human rights value system and a universally held moral standard. From an Eastern perspective this process of globalising Shoah discourse is often considered a Western preoccupation and just another mechanism with which to further Western cultural domination. In Central Europe the supposed singularity of the Shoah is not only often doubted, but the focus is far more on processing Communism and on identity-based policies to strengthen social cohesion in these times of rapid change and transformation.

To clarify and illustrate how the Shoah is reflected on in historical debates and the public domain, recent Polish and Hungarian monuments, museums, literature and films will be discussed.

Is there a solution for achieving a better mutual understanding? Might the Western narrative be indeed too limited, and should it focus more on the general totalitarian experience in the East? This might lead to the conclusion that Europe's collective memory turns out to be just as diverse as its diverging experiences. In that sense Europe is still far from an all-embracing historical narrative about the twentieth century. Or should one remain hopeful and consider a common European memory of the Shoah as a permanent and evolving process of negotiation and renegotiation of different images and narratives of history and victimhood? Are we perhaps just experiencing a transitional phase?

This is not just an academic debate, but even more so a political debate. History, identity and the politics of memory are often, especially in Central Europe, intertwined. As anti-EU sentiment and populist ideas of national identity are on the rise, clashes of memory across the former East-West divide are becoming more intense.

Return to Europe

In periods of dramatic change many people experience doubt about the foundations of their culture or identity. The aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall was indeed such a period. An ideology was discarded, an economical system was dismantled, and basic social conditions were liquidated: the world in which people had been living and growing up for forty years had disappeared. This naturally jeopardized their self-image, their identity. After forty years of communist lies and propaganda, the region was desperately in need of a new identity. In this search for a new identity history played a major role. Central Europe, as a region, made its reappearance on the map. The name for this region underlined both its distance from Eastern Europe and its nearness to Western Europe – as perceived by many former Polish, Hungarian and Czech dissidents, it hailed a 'Return to Europe'. Europe's heart finally seemed in its place again. From the outset, Central European states were expected to 'internalize' the Western set of norms and values, rather than modifying or transforming this set.

Since the acceptance of Central European countries as member states of the European Union in 2004, little has survived of the initial euphoria for the

European project. The ‘spirit of 1989’ seems to have faded; Brussels is increasingly seen as a new danger to Central European identity. As economic and legal borders between the nation-states have weakened, cultural ones seem to have strengthened. The newly established self-image of Central Europe collides with the image of the ‘other’ (Western Europe). Central Europeans tend to think that Western Europe has failed to recognize their victimhood. The more than two million non-Jewish Poles who were killed during World War II do not seem to exist for Western Europe, so the Polish litany goes. Instead, the three million Polish Jews are recalled time and time again. For outsiders, Poland has become a synonym for death and destruction, for the Shoah. The former concentration camp, Auschwitz, has developed into the Polish tourist attraction. This lack of Western appreciation and recognition for all that happened in Central Europe, especially during and shortly after the Second World War, has caused resentment and an unfortunate kind of victimhood rivalry. To many Central and Eastern Europeans, history is too often written from a Western-centered perspective. They seek recognition for ‘their’ history and resist the hegemonic ‘core European’ narrative, which does not include their experiences, their mentalities and their memories.

Victimhood: Image and Self-image

On February 25, 2016, the Polish national TV channel, Telewizja Polska, broadcast Pawel Pawlowski’s film Ida (2013), which is set in Poland in 1962. A young woman is on the verge of taking her vows to become a Catholic nun. Orphaned as an infant during the German occupation of World War II, she must now meet her aunt, a former communist state prosecutor. This aunt, who is her only surviving relative, reveals that her parents were actually Jewish. From that moment onwards, the two women embark on a road trip into the Polish countryside to discover the fate of their family. Little is said during the trip and even certain historical events (the German occupation of Poland, the Shoah and Stalinism) remain unmentioned. In 2015 Ida received the Academy Award in the category of ‘Best Foreign Language Film’. The broadcast of this movie on Polish television, however, was preceded by an informative disclosure that lasted sixteen minutes, mentioning, in detail, the ‘shortcomings’ of Ida: Polish-Jewish interrelationships were treated unilaterally and without referring to their historical complexity, and the Polish rural population was depicted as primitive, anti-Semitic and almost deprived of any human quality. Moreover, the movie did not mention the principal German responsibility for wartime suffering. To summarise the arguments of the official critics (this needs web reference, see

footnote below): only the Jewish point of view had been taken into consideration, which, apparently, had been the main reason for the bestowal of the Academy Award in the first place.

For the Polish self-image, the 'correct' reception of World War II is deemed essential, investing the nation with heroism, sacrifice and victimhood. A policy on history is developed in order to give the nation a positive image of its own past. This positive image is seen as a fundamental precondition for social cohesion. The proposed original law, introduced in March 2018 by the Polish government and making formulations like 'Polish destruction camps' and 'Polish crematories' punishable, must be seen in this light. For many Poles, the association of Poland and the Shoah has the effect of a red rag to a bull. The proper formulation should be 'Nazi camps on Polish territory' instead of 'Polish camps'. This may be a rather voluminous expression, but it is considered more appropriate and does not soil the Polish sense of honour. Former American President Barack Obama had to rescind his words when, in a 2012 speech, he used the expression 'Polish death camps', and subsequently offered an extensive apology.

The draconian measures the Polish government has taken against Jan Tomasz Gross match this impression. He has been under attack since 2000 when his book Neighbors: the destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne, Poland was published. Jedwabne, a small city in the northeastern part of Poland, 60 kilometers west of Bialystok, was the site where, in July 1941, a horrifying pogrom took place. Of the approximately 2,700 inhabitants, 1,100 were Jews. All these Jewish inhabitants were killed in July 1941 by their non-Jewish neighbors. The well-documented book provoked uproar in Poland. Criticism even intensified when it became clear that the murders in Jedwabne had not been an exception, but one of many comparable pogroms in the same region between July and August 1941. With the Soviet army retreating, the German army advancing, and government authority collapsing, civilian populations across hundreds of villages from the Baltic states to Romania committed atrocities against their Jewish neighbors (Kopstein and Wittenberg, 2018: 1). The Germans had not actively participated in these pogroms. 'Jedwabne' initiated a far-reaching and radical debate on the Jewish question in postwar Poland. Neighbors outlined a counter-memory to the accepted canon of Shoah, Polish-Jewish relations and Polish society during World War II. 'In order to reclaim its past', Gross concludes, 'Poland will have to tell its past to itself anew' (2003: 169).

An interview with Gross that appeared on 13 September, 2015 in the German newspaper Die Welt, added fuel to the fire: the refusal of Central European countries to take in Syrian refugees was the cause (Gross, 2015). Gross pointed at the offer of the Polish government to take in a maximum of 2,000 refugees, provided they were all Christians. He characterised this attitude of a country with forty million inhabitants as 'heartless' and 'shameless', mentioning Germany as a country that took responsibility and showed empathy. During an election campaign, Jarosław Kaczynski had warned that Middle Eastern refugees carried highly dangerous diseases and parasites. Gross linked this Central European attitude to the 'murderous history' that, according to Gross, is a feature of this region. Then a statement followed for which he is still being strongly criticized in Poland. He said that 'the Poles, rightly so, are proud of their role in the resistance against the Nazis, but actually they have killed more Jews than Germans.' Apart from the fact that Gross' statement is often misquoted out of context – he does not state that the Poles killed more Jews than the Germans did– this statement hit the Poles right in their hearts. Their self-image was flipped upside down. Poles were only partially granted the role of victim; they were also portrayed as perpetrators. Reactions were furious within Polish government circles. Investigations were started to determine whether Gross's entry into Poland could be restricted, and attempts were made to deprive him of the National Medal of Merit he had received in 1996 for his anti-communist position as a dissident in 1968.

The postwar struggle over historical victimhood in Central Europe has a longer history. Traditionally, Central European countries have felt underprivileged and betrayed by their larger neighbours – namely, Germany and Russia. Central European countries always got the short end of the stick when the superpowers decided it was time to push boundaries: the twentieth century is illustrative of this enduring injustice. From the perspective of Central Europeans, the West is a source both of inspiration and dashed hopes. According to George Schöpflin (2012: 23), we should accept the concept of 'incompleteness' as one of the defining features of Central Europe. This region experienced a number of externally driven and constructed transformations that interrupted a development towards liberal, democratic societies. Moreover these transformations caused feelings of insecurity and anxiety among inhabitants, feelings that persist to this very day. According to Schöpflin, the present-day democratic experiment in Central and Eastern Europe resembles 'the imposition of Communism: inasmuch as Communism was an attempt to introduce a

proletarian revolution without a working class, what is now happening is the introduction of democracy without democrats' (1994: 129).

In particular Poles and Hungarians seem to struggle with their victimhood. They often tend to wallow in the role of victim in order to divest themselves of every shred of responsibility. Imre Kertész (1929-2016), the Hungarian winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002 and a Holocaust survivor, often criticized this phenomenon. He emphasized this lack of collective responsibility when the history of his country was being mentioned. If one refuses to live through one's own experiences and to appropriate them, Kertész argued, there is no other option than ascribing the past to malicious, foreign, strange powers. According to Kertész, 'Hungary freed itself from Bolshevism, but not from itself' (2003: 233).

Victimhood gets even more complicated when the border between victims and perpetrators becomes blurred. There is a growing and disturbing tendency in which Communism and Jews are lumped together. In Central Europe the term zydokomuna is often used to refer to 'Jewish Communism' or a Bolshevik-Jewish conspiracy – sometimes the term 'Judeo-Communism' is used as well. Similar to the attitude of prewar nationalist circles, Jews are being identified as communists, destabilizing the country with their revolutionary ideas and bringing overall misfortune. Because Jews brought Communism to the region, it is suggested that they forfeited the right to be considered victims. These unfounded accusations often served to justify all kinds of anti-Jewish measures and even outright pogroms, like the one in Jedwabne. The wartime suffering of the Jews is matched, according to many Central Europeans, by the pain the Jews supposedly inflicted upon the Christian world during the communist era.

Shoah in Western memory culture

Since the 1970s, the importance of the Shoah in Western memory culture has increased constantly. In the first two postwar decades the emphasis in this memory culture regarding World War II was placed predominantly on heroism, resistance and the evil that had been conquered by united societal forces – a discourse that was both national and Christian. In the 1960s this image began to tilt. The central position of the Shoah in the memory culture of both the United States and Western Europe, might, in accordance with the American sociologist of religion Robert Bellah, nowadays be termed a 'civil religion'. The memory of the Shoah is kept alive in a ritual and emotional way. Special days have been reserved for this purpose, and historically meaningful locations have become

true lieux de mémoire. In this way the Shoah has been turned into a kind of religion with its own specific mythos, rituals, saints, and religious doctrine (see also Oegema, 2003). In the Western world the memory of the Shoah reached its apogee in the 1990s, at the same time the Cold War era abruptly came to an end. Eva Hoffman writes in After such knowledge: a meditation on the aftermath of the Holocaust: 'Memory stepped in at the very moment when the old geopolitical arrangements defining our world gave way, and no new "meta-narrative", no new frameworks for perceiving the world, had yet emerged' (2005: 242).

According to Ivan Krastev, the European Union has always been 'an idea in search of a reality' (2017: 5). Krastev argues that what once kept the union together no longer holds. Shared memories of World War II have faded from view (see, for example, Judt, 2005; Pakier and Stråth (eds), 2012; Leggiewie, 2010). Since the Berlin Wall fell, many historians have attempted to write a common European history based on shared totalitarian experiences of the twentieth century with the Shoah occupying a central role. The Cold War had created a sense of community and common interests between the Western European countries, acting as the great neutralizer of nationalism and the particular memories bound up with it (Diner, 2003). According to Lars Rensmann and Julius Schoeps these countries had to 'accept a substantial break with the past. Europe's post-national integration in the European Union evolved (..) as a moral and political counter-model to the anti-Semitic, totalitarian and ethnic-nationalist legacy that shaped the first half of the European twentieth century' (2011: 3). The end of the Cold War, however, revealed the fragility of this sense of community among the EU member states, and contributed, at first, to a politics of renationalization.

In 2001, Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider (2001: 214) espoused the thesis that the memory of the Shoah had turned into a 'new foundational element' after the Cold War and that it could constitute the center of an emergent common European memory. The predominance of the Shoah acquired the position of the 'ultimate evil', a position that was not challenged until the Eastern enlargement in 2004 when memory clashes intensified. In the Epilogue of Postwar, titled: From the house of the dead: an essay on modern European memory, Tony Judt concludes that 'those who would become full Europeans in the dawn of the twenty-first century must first assume a new and far more oppressive heritage. Today the pertinent European reference is not baptism. It is extermination. Holocaust recognition is our contemporary European entry ticket' (2005: 803).

Claus Leggewie (2009; 2010) too, in his articles 'Seven circles of European memory' and 'Battlefield Europe', is in search for a pan-European narrative that includes both East and West in a common European story. A pan-European historical awareness is necessary to cope with common political problems. Leggewie also warns that anyone who wishes to give European society a unified political identity will have to rate the discussion and recognition of disputed memories just as highly as treaties, a common currency and open borders. In his narrative the Shoah plays an important role as 'a negative founding myth'. In a way, the Holocaust has been transposed into a sort of pan-memory, a Western (if not global) heritage in which countries acknowledge the Shoah as part of their national history.

The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which was held between January 26 and 28, 2000, seemed to underline and institutionalise this growing global importance of the Shoah. Representatives from 46 governments around the world met in Stockholm to discuss Holocaust education, remembrance and research. At the end of this meeting, all attendees, including Poland and Hungary, signed a declaration committing themselves to the preservation of the memory of those who were murdered during the Shoah. This declaration states that January 27th – the day on which Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated in 1945 – will be recognized as Holocaust Memorial Day. Twelve European countries, including Germany, chose 27 January as their Holocaust Memorial Day, and eleven countries chose to adopt a different day linked to their own history. The first three points of the Declaration state that the Shoah fundamentally challenged the foundations of our civilization and that its unprecedented character will always hold universal meaning. The Shoah left an indelible scar across Europe and its magnitude, so the declaration continues, should be seared forever in our collective memory. With humanity scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight against those evils. The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research was institutionalized after the Stockholm Conference. The goal of this Task Force is a further normative European adjustment of the memory of the Shoah (Schmid, 2008: 189-190).

On November 1, 2005, sixty years after the end of the Second World War, the United Nations declared January 27th the 'International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust'. A few weeks later, on March 16th, the European Parliament passed a similar resolution by which the Holocaust

Memorial Day on January 27th became the first (official) European commemoration of the third millennium. An official policy on the history of the Shoah was indeed evolving. The Shoah became a global icon and a symbol for radical evil. It formed the starting point for a global human rights value system and posed an obligation to maintain a universally-held moral standard. These implications can be brought together in the line 'Never again Auschwitz!'

Shoah in Eastern memory culture

In Central Europe, under the influence of Communism, this process developed in a completely different way. After 1945 there was neither room, nor the perceived need, to reflect extensively upon the Jewish fate. There had been almost no public discussion of the Shoah. This postwar silence that fell across Central Europe remained unchanged for almost forty years. Communism left a vacuum into which nationalism, nostalgia, xenophobia and ancient quarrels flowed. The Shoah simply did not fit in the communist ideology, in which only fascists and anti-fascists existed. Anti-fascism enabled many countries to project all responsibility for war crimes onto Nazi Germany and served as a legitimising ideology and founding myth for the seizure of power in Central and Eastern Europe. Communists tended to downplay Jewish suffering in favour of working-class anti-fascism. Furthermore, the subject was not opportune for communists hoping to widen their small base of power in these countries. In 1973 Imre Kertész's novel Fateless was rejected by a Hungarian publishing house because it failed to conform to the prescribed opposition between National Socialism and Soviet Communism. Fateless did not fit with the doctrine of Communism as a new beginning after a historical conflagration (Cooper, 2011: 7; 11). Ironically, in 2002 it was precisely because of the content of this novel that Kertész received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

After the end of the Cold War the tendency to downplay Jewish suffering did not change overnight. In Central Europe, the Western preoccupation with the Shoah often goes uncomprehended and therefore a shared cultural memory still seems a long way off. The level of exclusive attention devoted to the Shoah in the West is considered to be historically unwarranted from the Central European perspective. At the same time, attention to the Shoah seems to function as a moral yardstick for new EU member states. Unlike Western Europe, in Central Europe the focus continues to be on working through the trauma produced during Communism. Victims of communist oppression feel like they haven't

been granted their rightful place in Europe's historical memory and moral consciousness.

To the West, the end of World War II meant freedom; for the other half of Europe it brought new forms of occupation, subjugation, and terror. In the countries behind the Iron Curtain a new form of totalitarianism was in the making, with one totalitarian experience following another. In this sense the totalitarian experience in Central Europe is far more complicated, layered, and bloodier than its Western European counterpart. In Central Europe, one frequently compares the experiences under Communism to those under Nazism. This comparison between Nazi and communist crimes, however, is rather controversial in the West because it counters the allegedly abhorrent uniqueness of Nazi crimes and the singularity of the Shoah in particular. In this part of the world Nazism is regarded as the absolute evil and is therefore incomparable per se. Communism, as objectionable as it may be, cannot be blamed for the systematic murder of a group of people based on supposed racial differences.

Terror House (Terror Háza in Hungarian) is a good example of the tendency to compare victimhoods. This museum, situated at 60 Ándrassy Boulevard in Budapest, offers a narrative of twentieth-century history in terms of totalitarianism, and is located in the former headquarters of the Hungarian Fascists (the Arrow-Cross Movement). After 1945 the building became the headquarters of the ÁVO, the communist Hungarian secret police. Financed and initiated in 2002 by the Fidesz government, the museum presents a rather one-sided view of the totalitarian experiences of the Hungarians in the twentieth century. Even before entering the building, visitors are confronted with two huge symbols: a red star and a black arrow cross. Both Nazism and Communism are presented as foreign-grown movements that were brought to Hungary by force. The museum leads its visitors on a chronological journey through fifty years of Hungarian history and documents both totalitarian regimes that ruled the country in the last century. Yet, the exhibition devotes far more attention to the communist era than to any events that preceded it. Only the first two rooms out of twenty deal with the wartime years, and the Shoah is treated as a marginal phenomenon. The overwhelming and interactive exhibition devotes vastly more emphasis – and space – to the crimes of Communism than to the annihilation of Hungary's Jews. This emphasis suggests that the communist era was far more significant and influential. Randolph L. Braham, an expert on the history of the Shoah in Hungary and the author of Politics of Genocide. The Holocaust in Hungary (1985) , strongly criticized the museum: 'it serves, above all, as a

formidable instrument in the hands of nationalists bent on vindicating and rehabilitating the Horthy's era and making it once more a past usable by politicians in the present' (2004: 14). According to Braham, successive post-communist Hungarian governments have consistently pursued policies that have been aimed at rehabilitating the interwar Horthy regime and revitalizing the national, Christian principles that guided it. Moreover, these policies try to absolve Hungary of any guilt for the Shoah by placing ultimate responsibility on the Germans and focusing on the 'positive' experiences of the Jews since their emancipation in 1867 and on the heroic activities of Christian Hungarian rescuers during the German occupation (Braham, 2016: 263).

In Hungary the politics of remembering the Shoah have been characterized more by conflict than by consensus. In the memorial year (2014), a statue was erected on Szabadság Tér (Liberty Square) in Budapest named the 'Memorial of the Victims of the German Occupation'. It depicts the crushing of the archangel Gabriel, symbolizing Hungary, by Germany's imperial eagle. The Hungarian nation as a collective is portrayed as a victim of Nazi predation (or rather 'German' predation, as no Nazi-symbol is shown). Critics of the monument argue that it distorts Hungary's role in the Shoah by exclusively blaming the Germans and, in doing so, evading responsibility for and suppressing the active role of Hungarians in sending more than 400,000 Jews to the death camps in 1944. Alarmed by these developments, Braham announced on 26 January 2014, in an open letter, his decision to return the Medium Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary, which he had received in October 2011. He regarded the memorial as 'a cowardly attempt to detract attention from the Horthy regime's involvement in the destruction of the Jews and to homogenize the Holocaust with the "suffering" of the Hungarians under German occupation,' an occupation that was, according to Braham, 'not only unopposed but generally applauded' (The Guardian, 2014). James Kirchick, in his book The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age, points at the fact that this monument in many ways resembles the work of socialist realism: 'Indeed, it's striking how a monument built by a government that claims for itself the exclusive legacy of Hungarian anti-communist resistance so much resembles a work of socialist realism. By obscuring Jewish victimhood entirely and ascribing total innocence to Hungarians and total evil to Germans, the memorial is as factually deceptive and politically exploitative as any Stalinist icon' (2017: 43).

In 2013, the Polin Museum, in the heart of the former Jewish ghetto of Warsaw, was founded. This museum encompasses a thousand years of Polish-Jewish

history and offers a versatile and nuanced overview of a community with all its highs and lows. The Shoah is indeed an important feature in this exhibition (though according to some Western critics not important enough, with 15% of the exhibition is devoted to the Shoah) but the terms 'Poland' and 'antisemitism' do not coincide in the museum's exhibition. Michael Steinlauf (2008: 318), a senior historical consultant at the Polin Museum, states that the focus of the museum is on centuries of ordinary Jewish life rather than on the intervals of catastrophe. Poland was for many centuries very attractive to Jews, who enjoyed more freedom there than in surrounding countries. Polin's depiction of the Polish Jewish experience is therefore ambiguous and leaves room for questions. The museum helps Poles to embark on a reconfiguration of their identity as something rather more diverse than homogenous and is thereby more suited to the complexities of twenty-first century Europe (Steinlauf, 2008: 321).

The Holocaust Memorial Center in Budapest was opened in 2004, sixty years after German troops occupied the country. This museum, even more so than Polin, serves as a kind of 'counter museum' for the aforementioned Terror House exhibition. The museum presents the Shoah, according to Paul Hanebrink, 'as an example of the slippery slope down which a society can tumble when it begins to deny basic rights to groups of its citizens' (2013: 282). The dominant motif of the exhibition is the relationship between the state and its citizens. The title of the permanent exhibition reads: 'From Deprivation of Rights to Genocide'. The occupation by the Germans brought a fatal acceleration of trends that had already started during the interwar period when, from 1920 onwards, anti-Jewish laws were introduced in Hungary. The exhibition aims at the preparation of young people for life in a democratic, multicultural, multilingual and more interconnected Europe (Hanebrink, 2013: 283). The Holocaust Memorial Center has often been criticized by the Fidesz government for the way it depicts the Shoah in Hungary in general, and the role of the Horthy government in particular.

In 2013 the announcement of the opening of a new Holocaust museum at the Józsefváros railway station in Budapest came as a surprise to many. The museum was curated as a memorial to child victims of the Holocaust. Mária Schmidt, a longtime advisor to Victor Orbán, who also is in charge of the Terror House, was designated as its general director. She declared that the site would only focus on the deportations and not on the events preceding them (Kovács and Mindler-Steiner, 2015: 61). The museum is seen by many as an 'alternative' to the Holocaust Memorial Center – a 'counter-counter museum', so to speak. The

name – House of Fates (Sorsok Háza) – is probably chosen to counteract the impact of the Nobel laureate Imre Kertész with his autobiographical novel Fateless (Sorstalanság). György Konrád, the Hungarian novelist who, as a child, survived the Shoah in Budapest, was asked to join the advisory board of the museum. In an open letter he rejected this: 'I find it difficult to free myself of the suspicion that this hurried organization of an exhibit is not so much about the 100,000 murdered Jewish children but rather about the current government' (Kovács and Mindler-Steiner, 2015: 60). The museum was supposed to be opened in April 2015 but so far the opening has not yet taken place.

Dreaming of Europe: the broken home

In Dreaming of Europe, Michael Zeeman (1958-2009), a Dutch writer and journalist, uses the metaphor of a broken home in an essay (Zeeman, 2004). After four decades of isolation, between 1945-1989, relatives have finally been reunited around the family table. Their conversation falters and the atmosphere is uncomfortable; the family members do not seem to have much in common anymore. The past decades have left their marks: experiences and memories differ. In short, it turns out that the family members have grown apart. It is not like awakening from a nightmare, feeling relieved that it is over while simply continuing your daily lives as the Western family members seem to think. 'We are family, and we show each other the proper respect, but when it comes right down to it we are not entirely certain that we are in agreement about the family history. Perhaps we need to take a good look at who actually appears in these old photographs of ours' (Zeeman, 2004: 47). Our confidence in the West turns out to be as naive as their distrust is legitimate. 'Yet difficult as a new world without borders may be, that which lies beneath, that world of experience and judgement, is more difficult by far' (Zeeman, 2004: 48).

In recent years the refugee crisis in Europe has shown that Central Europe does not share the very cosmopolitan values on which the European Union is founded. While many in the West tend to regard these cosmopolitan values as the core of their European identity, Central Europeans do not regard the return to a multicultural society as a very inviting prospect. In a way, the former East-West divide within Europe seems to have revived. This results in a division between a more globalist approach, coherent with an open society, versus a more nativist approach that suits a closed society. This chasm can be observed nowadays in many European countries. What we are experiencing in Europe today, according to Krastev (2018: 43), is not so much a 'lack of solidarity' but a 'clash of

solidarities'. National, ethnic, and religious solidarities are colliding with post-national, cosmopolitan solidarities on which the commemoration of the Shoah is also based. According to the Stockholm Declaration of 2000, the Shoah should be the starting point for a coherent system of values regarding human rights and a universally-held moral standard. And although most European governments signed the declaration, formally agreed the UN and EU resolutions and inaugurated an 'International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust', the true intentions of some of these countries might be doubted. In Central Europe two parallel official sets of memory exist side by side: one for internal use and one as a more symbolic gesture to the often critical outside world. The polarization of Holocaust remembrance between the EU member states in the West and those in Central and Eastern Europe seems to be growing.

A way out of the memory crisis?

The assertion that the future of Europe depends on a common memory of the twentieth century and that the processing of a totalitarian past is essential for democratization, seems by no means a commonplace. It raises the question of whether there might be a possible approach between the two conflicting perceptions of the Shoah and its place within a more general or even global setting. Are there developments pointing in the direction of a rapprochement between Western and Central Europe in this memory crisis? Not when one considers the illiberal turns taken by the dominant political parties in Poland (with PiS) and Hungary (with Fidesz). The nationalist-populist governments in power broaden the gap with their identity-based policies. At an academic level however, changes are indeed taking place. One might consider Timothy Snyder's Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin (2010) and Black Earth: the Holocaust as History and Warning (2015) as an attempt to overcome major differences within memory culture. Snyder tries to establish an approach to history where both totalitarian experiences are united. In the debate on the Shoah, he distinguishes so-called civilizers (the Europe of the Enlightenment in the West) and nationalizers (the Europe of Eastern experience). He criticizes the one-sided way in which the Shoah is regarded in Western Europe and is also critical of the recent dominance of its memory culture, arguing that: 'Commemoration is the siren song of signification, appealing to emotions but fatal for thought' (Snyder, 2013). That which is most effectively commemorated becomes that which is most felicitously narrated. This results, according to Snyder, in a representation of the Shoah that is often reduced to a reflection of

contemporary emotions. Snyder calls this confusion between present resonance and past power 'commemorative causality'. According to him we should pay more attention to the fate of the Ostjuden (Jews who lived traditional Jewish lives in Central and Eastern Europe and who spoke mainly Yiddish). These Ostjuden formed the overwhelming majority of the victims of the Shoah and were mainly killed by bullets instead of gas chambers. According to Snyder the lack of interest in the regional circumstances of the lands where Jews lived and died is symptomatic of this commemorative causality. Historians often tend to ignore the historical setting of the Shoah and focus too much on antisemitism as its main explanation. The result is an incomplete (Western) public understanding of the Shoah. The Western 'civilizers' tend to emphasize the singularity of the Shoah and the 'wrong turn' taken by German/Western civilization; the Eastern 'nationalizers' on the other hand emphasize Stalinist crimes towards their national states. Snyder (2013: 8) states that 'the cost of using east European anti-Semitism as the narrative glue that holds together shaky explanations of the Holocaust is the maintenance of the familiar civilizational gradient between West and East.'

Snyder also criticizes the way the image of evil in the West has been narrowed down to Auschwitz (the concentration and extermination camp). In the words of Snyder (2009): 'Auschwitz, generally taken to be an adequate or even a final symbol of the evil of mass killing, is in fact only the beginning of knowledge, a hint of the true reckoning with the past still to come.' Auschwitz became the symbol of the Second World War in the West. But is Auschwitz indeed representative of the Shoah? In his article 'Holocaust: The ignored reality', Snyder (2009) sums up a number of arguments why it is not. He even states that the narrative has an unmistakable Western flavour. In Auschwitz, the vast majority of victims came from Western Europe while most victims of the Shoah were actually Ostjuden. The Jews from Poland and the Soviet Union constituted the overwhelming majority of Jews who were killed; three million Jews originated from Polish and Soviet territory. A majority of the Ostjuden were not killed at Auschwitz but executed on the spot – the so called 'Shoah by bullets'. Those who were deported mostly ended up in Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek, and Chelmno. These were, unlike Auschwitz, exclusively extermination camps, where hardly anyone survived. Before Auschwitz even started operating in late 1942, the majority of Holocaust victims had already been killed. Those who did survive the Shoah were able to record their stories only in the West, as the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe were

disinclined to pay much attention to commemorating Jews as a specific group. Stalinism prevented us from seeing Hitler's mass killings in proper perspective, as Snyder argues (2009).

In their article 'On agonistic memory,' Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lange Hansen also try to find a way out of two conflicting modes of remembering the Shoah; negotiating between what they call the cosmopolitan mode of remembering on the one hand, and the post-nationalist mode on the other. They recognize the importance of transnational influence on local memory discourse and welcome at the same time the creation of collective feelings of solidarity. They have come up with the term 'agonistic memory', which is both reflexive and dialogic. Agonism refers to the need to recognize emotions and passions as an integral part of political confrontation – think of the 'broken home' of Zeeman – that in the end might lead to a more 'dialogic memory'. One should try to break through the walls of separate suffering. In this sense, Konrad Jarausch requires the recognition of the 'other' as equally afflicted.

Another alternative might be to link the various national memories with human rights and an awareness of racism and xenophobia. This seems to be an approach that is shared by Claus Leggewie. As one cannot prescribe the content of a European collective memory, 'forms of respectful confrontation' probably can be stimulated, as Leggewie (needs date) argues. The 'European way' might be to voice dissent and discuss historical debates openly. In doing so one might improve the functioning of contemporary European democracy. Eva Hoffman (2005: 277) states that 'sympathy for those who suffered is our moral duty; but we cannot cease to treat the victim as a moral being. […] We need the kind of tolerance that does not dissolve either others' or our own integrity or legitimacy.'

Collective memories should be based on the recognition that memories are indeed plural and never static. To reclaim their own pasts, people will have to recount their pasts anew, live through their own experiences and appropriate them. This is exactly what Ida does when she embarks on a road trip with her unknown aunt into a troublesome past. Europe should not only reinterpret its past but also try to re-imagine its future.

Dr. Stefan van der Poel is assistant-professor at the Department of History at the University of Groningen. His main fields of interest are Modern Jewish History, History and Culture of Central and Eastern Europe and processes of Globalization.

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